

You feel a strange feeling inside, a feeling which you have learned can be treated but not cured by a cup of tea at Mitzi's. So you get all of your things together in case the feeling passes and you want to browse the Internet, or read from your library book. And you go down the street to the cafe.

MITZI'S CAFE

Inside Mitzi's, you don't see any of your friends, so you order your tea and sit down at an empty table. You feel empty inside, yourself, with a kind of fire. What a strange life, to feel this way for no reason. You try to think of an evolutionary reason to feel this way, but you can't, but you know there must be some reason. If you could figure out when the feeling started, then you would know why you felt this way, but you can't remember. Your emotional life is a mystery sometimes. You feel no pity for yourself, no desire to change yourself.

But the tea does some good, helps to put a lid on things.

Then Brian comes in, orders a drink, and comes to sit at your table.

BRIAN: Hey, you look odd.

YOU: I feel kind of weird. You ever have a feeling of emptiness?

BRIAN: Yeah, definitely.

YOU: And then you feel a kind of panic?

BRIAN: Yeah, sometimes.

YOU: I have to drink tea to take the edge off the panic.

BRIAN: Yeah, water helps for me.

YOU: Do any of these feelings mean anything?

BRIAN: I don't know. I hope they do. I hope they connect to something spiritual.

YOU: I do too, but I think probably they're just weird chemicals in my brain.

BRIAN: But you don't know that they aren't connected to something spiritual.

YOU: No, you're right, I don't know.

BRIAN: We never know if anything is connected to the spiritual, at least, we're not allowed to believe that.

YOU: Yeah, you get funny looks if you do.

BRIAN: Do you believe in spiritual things?

YOU: Like the deeper desires of the heart?

BRIAN: Yeah. Maybe your heart is crying out for something, and that's why you feel empty and panicked.

YOU: Yeah, I think I do believe in that. Not rationally, but personally.

BRIAN: With your heart.

YOU: With my lived life. I don't have any place for that in my worldview. But I know with my heart that science is right and that the best way to know things is through science.

BRIAN: Would it help if you believed in God?

YOU: God could exist to my heart but not exist in the world that science talks about.

A man has been overhearing.

MAN: I hate to interrupt, but I find your conversation fascinating. Are you two grad students?

BRIAN: No, but I'm kind of like a grad student.

YOU: No, I'm a freelance editor.

MAN: Hi, my name is John. I'm in sales.

BRIAN: I'm Brian.

YOU: I'm Beth.

You feel a weird feeling about the man but it's faint and you figure you've already been feeling weird today.

JOHN: Fifty, sixty years ago, people cared about the kind of things you guys are talking about. But not anymore.

BRIAN: Really?

JOHN: Really. We're living in the end times,

buddy.

BRIAN: "The love of many will grow cold."

JOHN: You got the reference! Matthew 24! Fist bump!

Brian is too polite to decline, too caught up in this association.

JOHN: I used to be into what you guys were into when I was younger. You [he means you, Beth] look like you're about my age, 40s. But Brian here must be about how old I was when I was into this stuff. Fascinating stuff! I was in grad school myself. But then, you have to go out in the real world.

BRIAN: Oh, so you got into sales?

JOHN: That's right. And the thing that I realized in sales is that none of that stuff is real. Nothing in philosophy and religion and anything is real. Except. Unless. Other people believe it. Then it's real. You can believe it all day long. It can be the truth. It can be your personal experience. But if nobody else recognizes it as real, it's a waste of your time. Brian, you look like a philosopher.

BRIAN: I guess I am, to an extent.

JOHN: Perfect answer! So do you have your own philosophy? You do, don't you?

BRIAN: Yeah, I guess I do.

JOHN: You're so young. Gosh. Well, nothing you believe is real. Unless. Someone else believes it. And. You're not going to be able to keep being a

philosopher if you're surrounded by people who don't believe what you do.

He says this with a genuine note of compassion.

JOHN: If I were you, I'd find a job that pays. Get married, have kids, learn to like watching movies.

BRIAN: I already like watching movies.

JOHN: Hahahaha! Of course you do. Philosophers love movies! How could I forget? We used to watch the best movies when I would hang out with my friends in the philosophy department. *Last Year at Marienbad* -- now that's a philosophical movie. That was from back in the day when people used to care about things the way you guys care now. Your heads are in *Last Year at Marienbad* land. But the world we live in is the sequel to *Last Year at Marienbad*.

BRIAN: How could there be a sequel to *Last Year at Marienbad*?

JOHN: That's my point! You guys get what I'm saying right? You guys are philosophers. Hey, you want me to buy anything for you guys? I better order something or else they'll kick me out! Ha ha!

BRIAN: No thanks, I'm good.

You don't say anything by way of declining but you don't have to. He goes over to order.

You and Brian sip your drinks, knowing that you are both thinking of saying

things about him and wondering when he'll be out of earshot. He goes to sit at one of the outside tables, on this golden afternoon. You both know that he can't hear you.

BRIAN: Wow... that guy.

YOU: Yeah.

BRIAN: He said some interesting things.

YOU: Yeah. The part about "even if it's personal experience, if other people don't recognize it, it isn't real". That's so true. And so messed up.

BRIAN: Yeah, I've been in situations where people didn't want to believe my reality, so they didn't, so it wasn't real.

YOU: Yeah. There are people like that out there.

BRIAN: I think I'm a magnet for them. Or I was.

YOU: Same here.

BRIAN: So philosophy and religion are about seeing what you actually see, and the real world is about seeing what everyone else sees?

YOU: Maybe. I have a regular job and I don't see what everyone else sees all the time.

BRIAN: Yeah, I think a lot of people function fine in the economy and don't see things the way everyone else does, still see things the way they see them. But maybe if they really understood the way things work, reality, then they would see things the way everyone else does?

YOU: Huh. It seems like "reality" means, "that which will get you what you want in life".

BRIAN: Not the truth as it is in itself, independent of human needs and wants.

YOU: Yeah. So if that's "reality" in the "truth as it is in itself" sense...

BRIAN: It's saying that reality is personal, that it's all about our personal needs, desires, and agendas.

YOU: So then reality would be fundamentally personal.

BRIAN: Right. And that wouldn't make any sense according to materialism.

YOU: No, it wouldn't. But the thing is, what's "realistic" is not to commit to anything because it is what it is, but because it's useful. So materialism is useful in suppressing the spiritual world, of people seeing what they really see.

BRIAN: And also in emphasizing science so that people trust in technical solutions instead of spiritual ones.

YOU: Right. But the "realistic" view isn't forced to correspond with materialism. It doesn't even have to be true. It's fine being false, as long as it has power.

BRIAN: Right.

YOU: So what can we do?

BRIAN: You could convert to theism, but... what

would that do? "Realisticness" wouldn't listen to you. It can use theism just as well as it can use materialism.

YOU: Can we tell people that they should be into the truth, should really see things for themselves?

BRIAN: The funny thing is, that's the explicit message. But the effect of everyone believing whatever they see to be true is that when they argue with each other, they burn each other out, except in the ways where they all agree. And that's exactly the beliefset that that guy was talking about.

YOU: The remaining set of beliefs?

BRIAN: Yeah.

YOU: So what alternative is there to that?

BRIAN: I don't know. I would like to think that there could be one truth that we could all believe, without arguing over it, which could connect us to meaning. I'm working on my version of it, but I don't think it's likely that everyone would adopt it.

YOU: I think that there has to be something that helps people in their "realistic" lived lives in order to really make a difference. You'd better have not just the idea of God, but also a God who really speaks to people.

BRIAN: Yeah. You're right about my idea being theistic. Well, we can always wait for God to speak.

YOU: Not everyone finds that realistic.

BRIAN: That's the difference between theists and atheists. Theists are willing to keep waiting for God, for every new revelation of God. They'll wait their whole lives. And atheists have a need to connect to realistic reality, and they give up looking, and don't hear God when he speaks or would have spoken, over and over.

YOU: I don't exactly fall into either category.

BRIAN: Do you wait for God, but just haven't heard him?

YOU: Maybe. Maybe from now on I will.

BRIAN: Then, on the level of lived life, of deep trust, you are a theist.

YOU: But I don't have any evidence to believe in God.

BRIAN: But you wait for evidence. There's a philosopher, Joseph Godfrey, who says that that's what hope is, an openness to evidence. So you hope in God.

YOU: Maybe I do hope in God.

BRIAN: But you're right, you're also an atheist.

YOU: Yeah... for now.

BRIAN: An atheist... for now. Put that in your online bio.

YOU: It's funny that we think we'll believe what we believe right now, for our whole lives.

BRIAN: Lev Shestov had a bit about that. But the

thing is, how can you believe without believing that what you believe is always true? You can put on your Shestov glasses and say "well, technically, it could be wrong". But if you're being honest with yourself, you believe what you believe.

YOU: Sometimes I really do wonder if what I believe is true. But yeah, I see what you're saying.

BRIAN: You have to be able to be a witness to something. People like John want to silence your witness. It's a useful thing if you're into manipulating people's minds.

YOU: Can you get by in life without manipulating other people's minds?

BRIAN: We can spend a while talking about that, but consider, do the people who manipulate other people's minds ever think about the opposite to their point of view?

YOU: Maybe to figure out how to defend theirs better. But you're right, no, they don't care, they're just interested in winning.

BRIAN: I think you can get by fine in life without manipulating other people's minds, but it takes work to make society be such that it's not necessary. And you have to do something about manipulative people.

YOU: I always just try to get away from them.

BRIAN: Yeah, but there's probably a better way than that. But, yeah, that's the best I know how to do.

YOU: Maybe you have to fight for your values and

not run away. Fight for your voice.

BRIAN: Definitely. Unfortunately, the best value is one of perfect peace and leaving people in peace, and it's hard to fight for that without going against that vibe.

YOU: Maybe good isn't about being a good person, but about breaking the power of bad people, without compromising yourself.

BRIAN: That sounds both good and bad.

YOU: Yeah. I can see why Christians believed in the wrath of God.

BRIAN: The wrath of God sounds really good sometimes.

YOU: But wouldn't it be better to fight back with your own wrath?

BRIAN: It could be that, bad as the way things are is, it's even better than if people who thought they were victims went after the people who were aggressors because, a lot of the time, the victims are wrong, or wrong enough, like it would be better if they let things go a lot of the time. Not all of the time, but often enough that it's better for everyone to let things go, and some people would get victimized, than for everything to escalate.

YOU: Wait, what do you mean?

BRIAN: Like, if you're friends with someone and you think they did something wrong, you could be right, or you could be wrong. And even if you're right, you could respond in a way that makes things better, or that just makes them want to

retaliate. So there's a good chance that things will just get worse if you get someone back for wrong they did to you.

YOU: But you still should get out of unhealthy relationships.

BRIAN: Yeah.

YOU: So we've been doing the best thing overall, all along.

BRIAN: Not necessarily. Because maybe we could have been doing something better to help deal with manipulativeness in our culture, so that there were fewer manipulative people.

YOU: I think some people will always be manipulative.

BRIAN: Yeah, but people tend to be better people if you break their power.

YOU: Maybe that explains us. Our power is already broken, so we're good people, such as we are.

BRIAN: That "such as we are"... so humble... so broken...

You laugh, and he laughs with you.

YOU: There's no hope!

you say, smiling.

BRIAN: People like us are probably too pure to break the power of bad people.

YOU: People who speak the language of realisticness.

BRIAN: Maybe we can inspire people who do fight.

YOU: We can be mascots?

BRIAN: Yeah... no one takes beautiful people seriously.

YOU: Are you calling me beautiful?

BRIAN: It's a diagnosis, not a compliment, believe me.

YOU: I do believe you.

BRIAN: I think we're accepting our place in life.

YOU: Yeah, and that bothers me.

BRIAN: Maybe we're not good people. Maybe we need to repent.

YOU: Yes. Is there some way we can really change?

BRIAN: I don't know. But I can hope for change, for courage, strength, life.

YOU: You think that God will bring you those things?

BRIAN: Yes, God brings me many things, if I pray.

YOU: But fundamentally, this is a choice you have to make yourself, the choice to say "no" to people, to call out people. You have to see things for

yourself, in order to believe that other people shouldn't do the wrong thing, when they do it, in the moment.

BRIAN: And I make that choice by praying, and God gives me the eyes for it.

YOU: So I hope in God, and you hope in your God's appearing.

BRIAN: Yes.

You sit and finish your drinks. John gets off his cell phone and leaves his dishes on the table and gets his stuff together and walks away.

YOU: I see a hunger in his eyes.

BRIAN: Who are you talking about?

YOU: John. The man. Just now, as he walked away.

BRIAN: What kind of hunger?

YOU: I'm trying to figure it out. It could be the hunger of someone who wants blood. Or it could be the hunger of someone who wants love.

BRIAN: Simone Weil talks about the difference between "eating" and "looking". Love can be about eating someone, or looking at them.

YOU: Maybe I'm fooling myself to think that he really wants truth and love.

BRIAN: We don't know. God is powerful. And maybe it's too late for us with respect to John, but we can influence people who are younger than us?

YOU: What people younger than us? You're the youngest person I know. Do you spend time with anyone younger than you?

BRIAN: Yeah, I have a few friends who are younger than me.

YOU: Maybe you could get a job as a teacher.

BRIAN: I don't know if I could handle that.

YOU: Maybe some kind of instructor? Fewer students, fewer hours a day.

BRIAN: Maybe.

YOU: Yeah. Maybe. If it's your calling.

BRIAN: You don't believe in God, so how can there be callings?

YOU: I could be wrong about all that. But I believe what I believe.

BRIAN: Okay. Yeah, if it's my calling.

YOU: I take you seriously.

BRIAN: I take you seriously.

YOU: Even if you're beautiful.

BRIAN: Even if you're beautiful.

YOU: There, we had some chemistry.

BRIAN: It was nice.

YOU: We share some beliefs.

BRIAN: Yes.

YOU: So they're twice as real as if we didn't share them with each other.

BRIAN: Yes.

YOU: And if we're patient, and stick with each other, we'll get to the point where we are in tune with each other. And maybe there will be more people.

BRIAN: Beautiful people?

YOU: Yes, and people attracted to beauty, who can become beautiful.

BRIAN: And then we can help each other become strong.

YOU: Yes, without compromise.

You sit and look out the window.

BRIAN: We just made a decision.

YOU: I think so. We'll see what comes of it.

BRIAN: I think we should just live our lives and if it happens, it happens.

YOU: Okay.

BRIAN: I have to remember it, and you have to remember it, for it to happen.

YOU: Yeah, that makes sense.

BRIAN: Okay. Well, I think I've had enough talking

for today. I'd better get up and go for a walk.

YOU: Yes, I don't think I can do anything else. But we need to be apart, need to take a break from each other.

BRIAN: Yeah.

YOU: So I'll walk one way, and you'll walk the other.

BRIAN: Right.

You say this as you walk out the door of the cafe, and you go your way, and he goes his.

YOU BOTH AT THE SAME TIME: Bye!

You walk toward the setting sun and think of whatever, and then of whether you and Brian really will be what you've promised. Will his prayers work? Maybe they will prove to you that God exists, but probably not. It could just be something in his brain that evolved to need prayers to unlock it. But then, you realize that you don't know that it isn't God. There is something about reality that seems spoken by God.

You don't know if things can change in your lived life. You wonder if you're young enough to keep changing. You wonder what Julia would say if you said that. She's always changing, and never changes, and is younger and has been older than you. How strange Julia is, and how like herself she is. You wonder if she

would join in your pact with Brian. If there is a pact. Maybe the pact was made independent of you, but at the same time that you desired it, and it will work whether you like it or not. That would be the way of God, a god who strangely needs to wait for us to open the way to doing what would be in his own interests.

Perhaps the pact had already been made, and you and he just recognized the pact today. The pact had been made some time ago, first when you met Brian for the first time, next when Brian and Julia showed up on the same night, not so long ago.

You know that tomorrow will be a completely different day, and that you will be unable to stay in the same place you are in now. Life is what it is, and you keep on going through it.

You get back to your apartment and go on through your evening, and then you go to sleep.

[closing theme]

WAITING FOR MARGOT
Episode 9 "Selling"
Written 18 March 2019
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COMMENTS

1.

YOU: Huh. It seems like "reality" means, "that which will get you what you want in life".

BRIAN: Not the truth as it is in itself, independent of human needs and wants.

YOU: Yeah. So if that's "reality" in the "truth as it is in itself" sense...

In Beth's second line of dialogue, "That's" = "that which will get you what you want in life" and "'reality'" = "reality, what actually is, truth as it is in itself".

2. Joseph Godfrey may have been quoting someone else on hope (I don't remember). Godfrey's book on hope is A Philosophy of Human Hope.

3. What would it be like to be in sales?

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